

## 13 Performance and Reception

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We think we know what *Winterreise* is: a formal live performance by a classically trained baritone and concert pianist in a recital or concert hall, featuring all twenty-four songs of the cycle presented without interruption or deviation from the printed score in Schubert's original publication order. But in the full sweep of *Winterreise*'s reception history since 1827, performances satisfying all or even most of these conditions have been much less common than we might assume. The fact is that there are just as many *Winterreises* as there are performances, each informed by its own set of social, cultural, personal, historical, and technological factors. In this survey of *Winterreise*'s life in performance from Schubert's day up until the present, we will observe how the cycle's meaning is fundamentally dependent upon the manner and context of its presentation: performance as reception.

### *Winterreise* During Schubert's Lifetime

In early March 1827, shortly after writing the first twelve songs of *Winterreise* – at that time, we should remember, Schubert believed the cycle to be complete – the composer had just moved into Franz von Schober's apartment at the Blue Hedgehog and invited a few friends over to hear some new works of his. They came to Schober's at the appointed time, but Schubert never showed. It was only some time later in the year that Schubert felt ready to reveal the fruits of his labor, as we learn from the 1858 reminiscences of Joseph von Spaun, one of Schubert's oldest and most trusted friends:

For a time Schubert's mood became gloomy and he seemed exhausted. When I asked him what was the matter he merely said to me, "Well, you will soon hear it and understand." One day he said to me, "Come to Schober's today – I will sing you a cycle of terrifying songs. I am anxious to see what you will say about them. They have affected me more than has been the case with any other songs." So, in a voice wrought with emotion, he sang the whole of *Winterreise* through to us. We were quite dumbfounded by the gloomy mood of these songs and Schober said he had only liked one song, "Der Lindenbaum." To which

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Schubert only said, “I like these songs more than all the others, and you will get to like them too.”<sup>1</sup>

If it was indeed songs from *Winterreise* that Schubert hesitated to share with his friends back in March, then Spaun’s account helps us understand why. These songs were uniquely challenging and pervasively “gloomy,” perplexing even Schubert’s most intimate confidantes. If Spaun’s memory serves, and we draw upon other first-hand descriptions of Schubert singing, then we can imagine Schubert at the piano in the Schobers’ music room, alone with two dear friends in the most private of settings, singing through these “terrifying songs” (perhaps the first twelve, perhaps all twenty-four) with his thin but agreeable voice of middling range, going into falsetto when the tessitura was too high, singing plainly and without theatrical affectation, all while accompanying himself on one of the era’s fortepianos, with its more intimate dynamic range and variegated timbral palette in comparison with today’s instruments. Above all, Schubert seems to have communicated a powerful sense through his performance (“wrought with emotion”) that his own suffering was expressed in the work: “you will hear it and understand.” This first performance of *Winterreise* was an intensely personal and vulnerable act for Schubert, forging a direct link between Schubert himself and the protagonist of *Winterreise*, and it made a deep impression on Spaun. Throughout his 1858 narrative, Spaun draws a close connection between Schubert’s deteriorating physical and psychological condition and the creation of *Winterreise*, a connection set in motion by Schubert’s memorable embodiment of *Winterreise*’s wanderer in Schober’s apartment. Scholars often suggest that it was Schubert’s death in 1828, so soon after the creation of *Winterreise*, that made it irresistible for his contemporaries to hear the cycle in autobiographical terms, but we cannot underestimate the authoritative power of Schubert’s own performance of the cycle to have played a key role in cementing these associations as well.

Another reason why Spaun and Schober may have been initially put off by *Winterreise* was that Schubert decided to perform the entire thing straight through. With rare exception, song cycles up until the last third of the nineteenth century were virtually always treated as collections to be sampled from at the consumer’s discretion rather than as integral works. It may have been the unremitting aspect of *Winterreise*’s gloominess that posed a problem, not the gloominess itself. The same principle governed the presentation of song on the public stage. The first (and only) concert performance of a song from *Winterreise* during Schubert’s lifetime took place on January 10, 1828, when the tenor Ludwig Tietze sang “Gute Nacht” at one of the *Abendunterhaltungen* (Evening Entertainments) for

members of Vienna's *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Society for Friends of Music). Given the norms of nineteenth-century public concert programming, "Gute Nacht" would have been one of the only songs on offer – probably the only one, in fact – along with a smorgasbord of operatic numbers, a concerto, and some showpieces for solo instrumentalists and orchestra; for the somewhat more earnest and musically sophisticated audience of the *Gesellschaft*, chamber music would also have appeared. Audiences expected variety, so an entire song cycle would have been too taxing on attention spans, and, in any event, Lieder were considered to be too diminutive to warrant extensive inclusion in concert programs. One or two would suffice as palate cleansers in between the larger courses.

As a result, the individual songs of *Winterreise* tended to live lives of their own in the first half of the nineteenth century, and each life depended upon the specific performers, audience, and context at hand. As part of the *Abendunterhaltung* from January 1828, "Gute Nacht" may have been heard as a self-contained narrative aria of sorts, perhaps drawing associations with the oratorio roles Tietze was also known to perform in public concerts. Four days earlier, however, Tietze sang several Schubert songs "movingly and soulfully" at a musical house party hosted by the lawyer Dr. Kaspar Wagner, as described by Wagner's twenty-four-year-old niece Marie von Pratobevera in a letter to her fiancé, Josef Bergmann:

I could have wished, my friend, I might conjure you here, so beautiful and glorious was this celebration; and I was especially enraptured by the transfiguration of [Wagner's daughter] Marie, who forgot all her pains and sorrows [from the death of her fiancé three years prior] and was once again as if transported into the earliest years of fair youth from sheer musical enthusiasm . . . [O]ur little domestic nightingale Fanni [Marie von Pratobevera's younger sister] also sang two songs. She really has a very pleasant voice and feels what she sings.<sup>2</sup>

Presuming that Tietze gave "Gute Nacht" a trial run at this party, we can imagine that the song meant something quite different here, grouped together with other Schubert songs for the delectation of listeners who were already familiar with the composer and his music. At this private family get-together, the romantic betrayal and tender farewell depicted in "Gute Nacht" may have reminded Marie Wagner of her own life's tragedy, as the song resonated with personal significance far removed from the particulars of the cycle's plot.

The "domestic nightingale" Franziska ("Fanni") Pratobevera also enjoyed singing songs from *Winterreise*, as her sister wrote to Josef Bergmann a few weeks later. In that letter, Marie singles out "Wasserflut" as her favorite song in the cycle and characterizes *Winterreise* as "a

companion piece to *Die schöne Müllerin*, by the same poet, and also nearly identical in content. Laments over the unfaithfulness of a beloved.”<sup>3</sup> Today we would not be inclined to equate the two cycles so readily. The sudden surges of vocal range and volume in “Wasserflut,” for example, are usually performed by modern singers (and heard by commentators) as volcanic eruptions of harrowing despair and even deranged madness, typifying the existential angst that is supposed to distinguish *Winterreise* from its predecessor. But as embodied by Fanni, with her young, delicate amateur voice, and in the context of her own naïve and tender stage of life (“she feels what she sings”), “Wasserflut” was a tearful, sentimental song of lost love, at least for Marie, who wrote that “the music [of “Wasserflut”] is just as melancholy [as the poem], it completely suits the text and to hear it sung beautifully makes an infinite impression.”<sup>4</sup> A few months later, in May, Marie reported to her fiancé that Fanni made another impression with Schubert’s songs, this time on her own future fiancé, Josef Tremier, who was “enraptured by Fanni’s singing.”<sup>5</sup> It is entirely possible that songs from *Winterreise* figured into their courtship rituals.

### ***Winterreise* in the Nineteenth Century**

According to Spaun, we recall, Schubert declared that his friends would eventually come to like *Winterreise* despite their initial trepidation. Spaun continues:

He was right – soon we were enthusiastic over the effect of these melancholy songs, which Vogl performed in a masterly way.<sup>6</sup>

Johann Michael Vogl, renowned baritone of the Vienna Court Opera and some thirty years Schubert’s senior, became a staunch advocate of Schubert’s songs after first meeting the composer in 1817. By the time Schubert came to write *Winterreise*, Vogl had been singing his songs regularly in public and in private for ten years, sometimes with the composer at the piano, and he had become inextricably woven into the composer’s creative process. The composer Johann Vesque von Püttlingen once recalled that during the summer of 1827, while Schubert was working on the second half of the cycle, he and Schubert would visit Vogl’s apartment on Tuesday afternoons, “where [Vogl] would sing Schubert songs for us and sometimes a brand-new song as well, which Schubert had just brought with the ink hardly dry.”<sup>7</sup>

Whereas *Die schöne Müllerin* was dedicated to and associated most closely with Karl Freiherr von Schönstein, an amateur singer who was widely praised for his noble voice and the genteel sensitivity of his

interpretation, *Winterreise* became the property of Vogl, the imperious and cultured man of the theater. His song performances were dramatic and declamatory; they came across as heightened recitations of the poetry, with textual clarity and meaning front and center. According to Vesque, “[Vogl’s] motto was: if you have nothing to say to me, then you have nothing to sing to me either.”<sup>8</sup> Vogl therefore took an actor’s liberties with the musical script: he might lapse into speech or use falsetto, alter notes and rhythms, adjust dynamics, or add embellishments, all in order to intensify the theatrical impact of his performance. The practice was by no means unusual at the time, even if it would soon fall out of favor, and virtually everyone who wrote about hearing Vogl sing Schubert was profoundly touched by the experience.

Vogl’s last performance of any kind took place in 1839, five years after his final concert appearance and a year before his death at age 72. Spaun described it thus:

The noble old man was so obliging as to perform the complete cycle of *Winterreise* one evening for a gathering [*Gesellschaft*] at Privy Councillor [Karl von] Enderes’, in such a way that, notwithstanding [Vogl’s] greatly weakened vocal resources, the entire company [*Gesellschaft*] was moved to the very depths by it.<sup>9</sup>

Enderes was a close friend of both Spaun and Vogl and a full participant in the hijinks of Schubert’s inner circle during the mid-1820s, including hosting duties for many a musical house party (the so-called “Schubertiades”). Here in his home once again, eleven years after Schubert’s passing, an elderly Vogl was persuaded to re-enact a scene from the glory days of the old *Gesellschaft*, his voice a shadow of what it once was. This performance of *Winterreise* was also a performance of collective memory, conjuring up the group’s shared history and evoking meditations on mortality and the passage of time. Given the tight connection between *Winterreise* and Schubert’s own mortality in the minds of the gathered friends, the composer’s absence must have been palpable, the atmosphere séance-like.

Not everyone enjoyed Vogl’s performances so unreservedly, however. At the end of the 1850s, the lawyer, musical connoisseur, and Schubert contemporary Leopold Sonnleithner claimed that Schubert’s songs were “usually performed these days in a manner that is directly opposed to the intention of their creator” and asserted that “their musical beauty is in no way dependent on a declamatory style of performance,” implicating Vogl as the progenitor of this worrisome trend.<sup>10</sup> In his written reflections on the singing of Schubert’s songs, Sonnleithner advocated for performances of unaffected simplicity and naturalness that always preserved the integrity

of the melody and remained faithful to the composer's conception as notated in the score. In this, Sonnleithner was upholding the ideology of absolute music – the concept of music as an abstract, autonomous art form of “purely musical” values, un beholden to non-musical concepts or prerogatives – and applying it to Schubert's Lieder in an effort to elevate them alongside the sonata and symphony in the hierarchy of genres.<sup>11</sup> Sonnleithner acknowledged that the singer had a responsibility to the text as well, not just the music, but here is how he defined the singer's role:

The lieder singer, as a rule, only relates the experiences and emotions of others – he does not himself impersonate the character whose feelings he depicts. Poet, composer, and singer must conceive the song *lyrically*, not *dramatically*.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas Vogl, the great showman and longtime opera singer, fully inhabited the poetic persona of a song and brought this character to life with all the dramatic tools at his disposal, Sonnleithner felt that the singer should use “purely musical” expression to comment on the song's persona from a narrative distance. This debate about song performance – dramatic enactment vs. lyrical narration – gained steam in the twentieth century, as we shall see, and it continues to the present day.

In certain respects, the German baritone Julius Stockhausen would seem to have fulfilled Sonnleithner's wishes for song; Stockhausen once told his students that “you must not exhibit your personality in the concert hall, for there you are nothing but an interpreter of the poet and composer.”<sup>13</sup> Stockhausen's teacher had been the legendary vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia, whose specialty was *bel canto* opera, but in the concert hall, as the pre-eminent Schubert singer of the mid-nineteenth century, Stockhausen used his operatic training as a vehicle for lyricism and precise, meaningful diction, rather than vocal and theatrical display.

Regarding Schubert's song cycles, Stockhausen is most famous for being the first singer to perform them not only in their entirety (as Vogl had been cajoled to do in 1839 as a special occasion) but also in public. After studying *Winterreise* with Garcia in London in 1851, Stockhausen began to include songs from the cycle in his concerts, most notably in a Hamburg soirée given by the great pianist Clara Schumann in 1862. The concert began with Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet, Op. 44, followed by the first thirteen songs of *Winterreise* – that is, the first thirteen songs in Müller's final ordering of his published poems, rather than the order found in Schubert's score (more on this below). The songs were grouped in sets of four or five, interspersed with piano works by Bach, Scarlatti, and Mendelssohn, and there were almost certainly improvised transitions as well. The audience would have expected Schumann to offer some solos in

her soirée, and the alternation of genres prevented the audience's attention span (as well as Stockhausen's vocal stamina) from flagging. The result was a fluid dialogue between vocal and instrumental music, with the songs providing a storyline and the piano solos perhaps intended to provide guided reflection upon it, somewhat like the relationship between the Gospel recitative and the arias in a Bach Passion. Here we see the beginnings of the full-scale narrative approach to presenting *Winterreise* in concert, but the narrative itself would have been quite different than what we usually experience today. In the program, the songs were listed as follows:

**Reisebilder** ["Travel Pictures"] von *Wilhelm Müller*, *Winterreise*  
comp[oniert] von ..... *F. Schubert*.

The new title was likely to remind the audience of Heinrich Heine's well-known *Reisebilder* (1826–31), a journalistic travelogue interlaced with poetry, fictionalized autobiography, and socio-political commentary, all featuring the author's characteristic wry irony. Stockhausen's framing of *Winterreise* in Heinesque terms might have underlined the dark cynicism of "Der greise Kopf," "Die Krähe," and "Letzte Hoffnung," the penultimate three songs on the program, as well as the biting social criticism of the concluding song, "Im Dorfe," as though *Winterreise* were a subsection of Müller's own (non-existent) *Reisebilder*.

Two years later Stockhausen returned to Hamburg and gave his first public performance of the entire cycle, and once again, he used the poet's final published order. Commentators usually agree that Müller's order has a more linear dramatic structure in comparison to the more inward psychological journey of Schubert's order. In Müller's order, for example, the wanderer climbs mountain paths in song 16, "Der Wegweiser," and two songs later, he descends them in "Irrlicht," which is song 9 in Schubert's order. Stockhausen's preference for Müller's order even extended to musical details that now bolstered the cycle's narrative logic. The mysterious horn calls that suffuse song 5, "Der Lindenbaum," are often heard as mythic emblems of memory and the distant past, but in Müller's order, when this song is followed by the piano introduction of "Die Post," we suddenly hear the very real horn calls of the mail carrier; Stockhausen loved this juxtaposition, noting that "this posthorn that tears the wanderer away from his dreams and his lime tree has a magnificent effect."<sup>14</sup> Despite Sonnleithner's admiration, then, Stockhausen ultimately seems to have been more interested in impersonating a character with a coherent "dramatic" arc than in narrating that character's experiences at a "lyrical" remove.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was Stockhausen's student Gustav Walter, lyric tenor and veteran of the Vienna State Opera, who inherited the mantle of greatest Schubert singer alive. Walter's legendary all-Schubert recitals (known as *Liederabende*, literally "evenings of song") transfixed a Viennese public eager to celebrate the musical heritage of their city and empire in an era of increasing nationalism. As sung by Walter with a mellifluous yet powerful voice built for Mozart as well as Wagner, Schubert's Lieder were heard as the virtual folk-songs of the Austrian people stemming from the pen of their most beloved native son. Walter gave complete performances of both Schubert cycles during his recital years, but as with Stockhausen before him, *Die schöne Müllerin* had much more success with audiences than *Winterreise*. With its tuneful strophic songs and picturesque love story, *Die schöne Müllerin* was much more suitable to the project of Austro-German identity formation, and it remained the darling of the sentimental nineteenth century. The neurotic twentieth century, on the other hand, found itself ineluctably drawn to *Winterreise*.

### ***Winterreise* in the Twentieth Century**

In 1921, the German music critic Paul Bekker singled out *Winterreise* (along with the six Heine songs of *Schwanengesang*) as most representative of how, in Schubert's hands, the Lied shed its predominantly social character from the eighteenth century and instead became a "monologue of the soul":<sup>15</sup>

This lyric [song] of Schubert's is confessional music of the most intimate kind. Its uniqueness and inner grandeur arise precisely from the emphasis on the private character of experience, the insulation from the external [world], the conscious avoidance of every call to fraternal feeling.<sup>16</sup>

It was the reclusive, self-absorbed dimension of *Winterreise* that led Bekker to claim it as the quintessence of the entire Lied genre, and in his preference for the cycle he was prescient. Certainly for the latter half of the twentieth century, *Winterreise* captured the radical aloneness and existential alienation of modernity and provided a rich field for the exploration of interior psychological realms in the shadow of Freud.

As a consequence of these priorities, Bekker argued that the concert stage, with its pronounced emphasis on visual presentation and virtuosic performance effects, was no place for the Lied:

When one relocates a series of Lieder like *Winterreise* or pieces like "[Der] Doppelgänger" or "Die Stadt" [from *Schwanengesang*] into the modern concert



hall, even if the lighting is ever so “atmospheric,” there is in this just as much of a flagrant falsification of the fundamental artistic essence as if one had an Adagio from one of Beethoven’s string quartets played for a military parade . . . [In Schubert’s songs] a solitary soul sings completely for itself, freed from outer dependencies and connections. Schubert’s deed rests entirely in this disentanglement, in this unreserved freedom of the most inward disclosure of feeling. Participation in this [inward disclosure of feeling] through listening demands deliberate preservation of the frame contingent upon such requirements, demands absolute suppression of all externalizing, coarsening means of representation, even in the least.<sup>17</sup>

For Bekker, the only way for a listener to truly connect with the emotional and psychological journey of the “solitary soul [that] sings completely for itself” in the Lied meant a total elimination of the communal as well as the visual. The experience had to be not only entirely private but entirely aural as well, going far beyond the intimate conditions of domestic music-making that marked Schubert’s own era. Bekker seems to be suggesting that Schubert’s songs (with the songs of *Winterreise* foremost among them) were still waiting for their proper medium, one in which there would be, strictly speaking, no audience and no performers at all. Seven years after Bekker wrote his essay, the first-ever complete recording of *Winterreise* was released on eight 78rpm discs, featuring Austrian operatic tenor Hans Duhan and pianists Ferdinand Foll and Lene Orthmann. If the apotheosis of the nineteenth-century appreciation of Schubert’s song cycles was Stockhausen’s nationalistic 1862 *Volkskonzert* (People’s Concert) in Cologne, where an appreciative audience of two thousand erupted in applause after each song of *Die schöne Müllerin*, the ideal image for the twentieth century would be a pensive single individual at home by the hi-fi, listening intently to the latest recording of *Winterreise*.

Before Duhan’s 1928 release, singers only recorded selections from *Winterreise*, reflecting not only the temporal limitations of the gramophone record but also the continuing traditions of the concert stage. In the ensuing decades, the relationship between concerts and recordings reversed; as unabridged recordings of the cycle became the dominant mode of appreciation, live performance now aimed to replicate that standard, resulting in the familiar norms for the complete concert presentation of *Winterreise* described at the beginning of this chapter. Consumers of recordings could take in the entirety of *Winterreise* much more comfortably and at their own pace, with texts, translations, and liner notes at hand to enhance their deepening understanding of what was now perceived as an integral “work.” Bekker may no longer have been horrified by the idea of *Winterreise* in public performance had he lived to see the effects of these developments by the mid-twentieth century, when one of *Winterreise*’s

leading exponents, the German lyric baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, is said to have declared that “only the voice (and therefore the soul) and one’s facial expression should speak in a Lied.”<sup>18</sup>

We can chart the range of interpretations of *Winterreise* on record using Sonnleithner’s nineteenth-century categories of “lyrical” and “dramatic” expression, as applied respectively to the two singers most closely associated with the cycle in the twentieth century: the stentorian German bass-baritone Hans Hotter (1909–2003), known also for his Wagner roles, and Fischer-Dieskau (1925–2012). Both singers performed and recorded *Winterreise* more frequently and with greater authority than anyone else, but their approaches were polar opposites in many respects. Here is how Hotter conceived of his task as a Lieder singer, as framed by his biographer, Penelope Turing:

[T]he singer can be either subjective or objective in his presentation. He can actually identify himself with the character, or he can reveal him with the knowledge and compassion of the creator of the work, as a storyteller . . . [Hotter] says the second [position] is the better of the two. Perhaps it is because the central character in *Winterreise* or any other song of this genre is too engrossed in himself to belong consciously to his surroundings. When the singer stands outside the character he is more closely identified with the flow of the pianist’s accompaniment. Together they show us the unhappy and egocentric hero, both as he feels and as he is.<sup>19</sup>

Hotter’s “objective” storyteller is none other than Sonnleithner’s “lyrical” narrator who recounts the feelings of the protagonist from the omniscient perspective of the composer, as one part of the composer’s composite musical design (voice and piano).

We can get a good sense of Hotter’s “lyrical” interpretive style from the rendering of “Letzte Hoffnung” on his 1954 *Winterreise* album with pianist Gerald Moore. In this song, the protagonist describes his habit of gazing at the colored leaves on the trees, pinning his hopes on one leaf as it is buffeted by the wind, only to watch it fall to the ground as a symbol of his own despondency. Schubert’s setting contains a striking number of textural juxtapositions and unsettling rhythmic patterns, but Hotter and Moore’s performance has a remarkable steadiness and equanimity about it. Their tempo (♩=66) takes Schubert’s opening instruction of “not too fast” quite earnestly, and Moore’s fat staccato eighths hold to that tempo with metronomic precision – his leaves flutter about in slow motion. Hotter maintains the beauty of his sound throughout, letting the “purely musical” line do the work. His voice is evenly suffused with a pale, doleful timbre that is imperturbably smooth and sustained; a faint sense of worry colors the voice when the wind begins to play with the protagonist’s leaf (mm. 18–22), but it dissolves as gently as it had arisen. Apart from where it is

required by the score (mm. 29–30), their tempo only changes from m. 35 to the end, when the protagonist weeps over the grave of his hopes. The slower tempo here is indeed funereal, but in the manner of a sympathetic bystander to the graveside scene, not a suffering mourner. Hotter even represses the power of his voice for the high note in m. 39 on “wein” (weep), suggesting that he pities the protagonist but does not actually weep with him. His performance creates the impression that he is reflecting upon the protagonist’s plight from a great temporal and psychological distance, as though he were watching these events unfold on film.

In contrast, in their 1966 recording, Fischer-Dieskau and pianist Jörg Demus give us a “dramatic” interpretation in which they appear to be living through the protagonist’s harrowing experience in real time. Within their more energetic basic tempo ( $\text{♩}=96$ ), Demus plays his eighths with constant rubato – his wind is stronger and more erratic, his leaves more in present danger of falling. In mm. 10–13, Fischer-Dieskau burrows into “oftmals in Gedanken stehn” (stand often in thought) with an intense crescendo and ritardando whose momentum lands in the middle of the word “Gedanken” just as his vibrato suddenly flattens out. The effect is of someone terrifyingly transfixed by an image (the trees mentioned in m. 10) who then drops precipitously into brooding contemplation as a consequence. In mm. 18–22, where Hotter dimly gestures toward the protagonist’s anxiety, Fischer-Dieskau sings with an agitated, panicky timbre as the wind plays with his leaf, then meekly withdraws with a bit of a sob on “zitr’ ich” (I tremble). Because the contrasts of tempo, dynamics, and expression in the latter part of the song are much more pronounced in Fischer-Dieskau’s performance, we feel that he is describing and participating in actions that are now taking place: the leaf falls to the ground, his hope disappears, he falls to the ground, he weeps. The lachrymose plangency of his full-volume “wein” in m. 39 connotes a character who is actively, even self-consciously, in the throes of grief.

The difference between Hotter’s and Fischer-Dieskau’s versions of *Winterreise* is also indicative of what is often recognized as a broader shift in performance style around World War II, when naïve simplicity and directness in Schubert singing gave way to psychological complexity and turbulence. As one listens to the full gamut of recordings of “Letzte Hoffnung” across the twentieth century, for example, tempi speed up drastically and the rubato becomes more chaotic, underlining the protagonist’s schizoid qualities. Yet alongside this general trend, the “dramatic” and “lyrical” approaches still competed with one another throughout the century and continue to inform performances today. In the early 1940s, at the then-customary slow tempo, Lotte Lehmann sang “Letzte Hoffnung” with a “dramatic,” almost expressionist intensity that is comparable to

what Ian Bostridge achieves today at a modern fast tempo, and for every Bostridge in the contemporary universe of Lieder singers there is a Matthias Goerne or Christian Gerhaher who offers a more reflective, observant, “lyrical” interpretation. Moreover, the many female singers who have tackled the cycle (again Lehmann, but also Elena Gerhardt, Christa Ludwig, Brigitte Fassbaender, and Christine Schäfer, just to name a few) can be analyzed similarly; the fact that Müller’s wanderer is male has not ultimately proven to be an obstacle, even if it has sometimes aroused mild resistance from some critical quarters. As Lehmann once wrote, “why should a singer be denied a vast number of wonderful songs, if she has the power to create an illusion which will make her audience believe in it?”<sup>20</sup>

### ***Winterreise* in the Last Twenty-five Years**

In recent times, *Winterreise* has been presented in alternative performance formats with ever-increasing frequency, certainly more often than any other song cycle in the repertoire. This is partly a simple function of *Winterreise*’s fame within the canon. But with its relatively undefined protagonist, a narrative with sparse particulars, and its themes of heartbreak, alienation, and self-examination, *Winterreise* has proven to be especially suitable for creative adaptation in our own age. And as always, each performance concept coaxes a different meaning out of Schubert’s work.

We can organize unconventional contemporary approaches to performing *Winterreise* into three categories, or at least three tendencies, which sometimes overlap. The first tendency is to universalize the work by condensing its details into an overall concept that gives audience members something to reflect upon but is abstract enough to allow them maximal freedom of interpretation and identification. The forerunner of this strategy is the 1970 BBC concert film directed by John Culshaw, featuring tenor Peter Pears and his partner, the composer Benjamin Britten, offscreen at the piano. Pears wears an antiquated brown wanderer’s frock, and for each song he stands in a different location of a staged rocky landscape lit in an appropriate mood; often a relevant pictorial image in white light is projected behind him. In 2002, the choreographer Trisha Brown set this strategy in motion by having three dancers create enigmatic visual metaphors for each song as baritone Simon Keenlyside navigated their space while singing. In his 2004 production, baritone Thomas Guthrie sings in the dark while operating a Bunraku-style puppet with a doleful, moon-like face. Meanwhile, Chris Herbert’s 2012 *Winterize* takes

the cycle outdoors, asking audience members to carry transistor radios and follow the baritone on a literal winter's journey through an urban environment (originally Brooklyn Botanic Garden) as he sings the cycle with piano accompaniment broadcast through the radios.

A second strategy is to find ways of putting modern audiences more directly in touch with *Winterreise*'s historical dimensions. For example, in several concerts as well as a 2017 recording, tenor Julian Prégardien and pianist Michael Gees took inspiration from Clara Schumann's 1862 soirée with Julius Stockhausen (discussed above) by breaking up their performance of the cycle (this time complete, and in Schubert's order) with intervening piano pieces by Bach, Scarlatti, and Mendelssohn as well as piano improvisations. In 2015, Kathryn Whitney's "*Winterreise* Project" brought twenty-seven amateur singers and pianists together to learn and perform *Winterreise* on their own, in order for them to experience how other non-professionals had engaged with the cycle for at least the first few decades of its existence. The hurdy-gurdy virtuoso Matthias Loibner unearthed the full historical significance of the textual and musical references to his instrument embedded in "Der Leiermann" by recording the entire cycle with folk-pop singer Nataša Mirković in 2010. To unaccustomed ears, the twangy exoticism of his arrangement takes *Winterreise* out of the realm of high art and into the domain of the marginalized class of musicians to which a hurdy-gurdy man would have belonged in Schubert's time. Loibner's arrangement also reframes the cycle so that the protagonist's final question to the hurdy-gurdy man ("Will you play your organ / To my songs?") is anything but rhetorical – the answer is yes, and we have just heard that very performance.

Finally, there are those adaptations of *Winterreise* whose principal aim is to reveal its contemporary relevance. In 1993, the composer and conductor Hans Zender created a "composed interpretation" of *Winterreise* that rehearses the piece through the filter of subsequent music history. His wildly colorful orchestration cuts, splices, and replays passages, adds sound effects, and alludes to a variety of musical styles in an attempt to bring out the modernity latent in Schubert's cycle, where in Zender's words, "the expressionism of our time is already announced."<sup>21</sup> In John Neumeier's 2001 choreography for the Hamburg Ballet, set to the Schubert/Zender version, the protagonist is split into multiple dancers, each isolated in their own world, reflecting the sense of disorientation, insecurity, and estrangement caused by the events of September 11 of that year. Neumeier puts a heartbreakingly contemporary spin on "Das Wirtshaus," in which Schubert's protagonist yearns to join the dead and buried in a cemetery but must continue on his journey alone. A glass roof slowly descends on a group of dancers while a few onlookers watch helplessly from outside the

glass walls of the space; one by one, the dancers are forced to roll out of the dwindling space as the onlookers impotently bang on the walls, left to carry on with their lives in grief. Peter Härtling's 1997 play *Melchinger Winterreise* is laced with performances of most of the cycle's songs in various formats, juxtaposed provocatively against scenes from Schubert's later life as well as Härtling's own youth as a post-WWII refugee. In Christoph Biermeier's 2017 restaging of the play for Theater Lindenhof, the protagonist's identity as an exile is made even more contemporary when refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, and Eritrea speak the words of the cycle's poetry and share their own stories of fleeing war and persecution.

We can close with *Three Pianos*, a 2010 play by theater artists Rick Burkhardt, Alec Duffy, and Dave Malloy that blends all three approaches. The play contains within itself a nearly complete performance of the cycle to the accompaniment of upright pianos whirled about the stage by its three creators. They sing the songs with ordinary untrained voices, using a mixture of prosaic English and the original German, and their musical arrangements are all over the map: stadium rock for "Rückblick," Tom Waits for "Die Krähe," their own indie pop setting of "Letzte Hoffnung," bluegrass-barbershop a capella for "Die Nebensonnen." Playing host to a Schubertiade for the audience that includes free wine, they recreate the down-to-earth ambience and intimacy of Schubert's debut of the cycle in Schober's apartment. At the same time, they make direct connections between the protagonist's journey and the struggles of modern love and relationships. At the end, as snow gently falls on the three sweater-clad actors, each in their own world, performing "Der Leiermann" in the form of a curious, mechanical waltz, one has the sense that *Winterreise's* distillation of the loneliness of the human condition will find sympathetic and creative responses for generations to come.

## Notes

1. *SEF*, 160–61. My translation is adapted from *SMF*, 137–38. All translations from *SMF* in this chapter are similarly adapted.
2. *SDL*, 475. My translation is adapted from *SDB*, 708. All translations taken from *SDB* are similarly adapted.
3. *SDL*, 481; *SDB*, 716–17.
4. *SDL*, 481; *SDB*, 717.
5. *SDL* 519; *SDB*, 779.
6. *SEF*, 161; *SMF*, 138.
7. *SEF*, 248; *SMF*, 215.
8. *SEF*, 248; *SMF*, 216.
9. *SEF*, 420; *SMF*, 364.
10. *SEF*, 388; *SMF*, 337.
11. For more on this point, see Eric Van Tassel, "Something Utterly New": Listening to Schubert Lieder. 1: Vogl and the Declamatory Style," *Early Music* 25/4 (Nov. 1997): 705–6.
12. *SEF*, 135–36; *SMF*, 116.

13. As quoted in Edward F. Kravitt, *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 55.
14. As quoted in Martin Günther, *Kunstlied als Liedkunst: Die Lieder Franz Schuberts in der musikalischen Aufführungskultur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016), 282; the translation is mine.
15. Paul Bekker, "Das Lied: Ein kritisches Fragment," in *Klang und Eros*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1922), 286; all translations from Bekker are mine.
16. Bekker, "Das Lied," 288–89.
17. Ibid.
18. Laura Tunbridge, *The Song Cycle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147.
19. Penelope Turing, *Hans Hotter: Man and Artist* (London: John Calder, 1983), 206.
20. Lotte Lehmann, *More Than Singing: The Interpretation of Songs*, trans. Frances Holden (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1945), 16.
21. Hans Zender, "Schubert's 'Winterreise': Notizen zu meiner 'komponierten Interpretation,'" in Zender, *Wir steigen niemals in denselben Fluß. Wie Musikhören sich wandelt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 86.